

Patent Application of
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for
HALF-BRIDGE INVERTER FOR ASYMMETRICAL LOADS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

Not applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to high frequency switchmode half-bridge inverters for asymmetrical loads and specifically to high frequency electronic ballasts for gas discharge devices. More specifically, the present invention relates to high frequency electronic ballast for high intensity discharge (HID) lamps.

The prior art is replete with many known half-bridge inverters providing high frequency ballast for gas discharge lamps, especially for HID lamps. For instance, high efficient electronic ballasts based on half-bridge inverter configuration which can be used with HID (HPS) lamps are US Patent No. 5,313,143 entitled "Master-slave half-bridge DC-to-AC switchmode power inverter" (See also a paper entitled "Master-Slave Half-Bridge Inverter" presented at APEC' 93); US patent No. 5,229,927, entitled "Self-symmetrizing and self-oscillating half-bridge power inverter", and US patent No. 6,329,761, entitled "Frequency controlled half-bridge inverter for variable loads" from the same inventor of the present invention. Further applications of half-bridge inverters are US

patent No. 5,253,157, entitled “Half-bridge inverter with capacitive voltage equalizer” from Severinsky; US patent No. 6,242,867, entitled “Circuit for synchronizing the ignition of electronic ballast discharge lamps” from Pogadaev, and US patent No. 5,932,976, entitled “Discharge lamp driving” from Maheshwari, especially for ignition methods. Some of the cited inventions provide solution for equalizing the voltages of the voltage divider capacitors of a half-bridge inverter, but none of these inventions solves a specific problem related to the startup process of a HID lamp, especially for metal halide lamps, described in the following part.

An important application of the switchmode power inverters is supplying gas discharge devices, especially high intensity discharge (HID) lamps in the range of 35W to 400W. In this case, the load impedance of the inverter is a HID lamp connected in series with an inductor. At high frequency powering of a HID lamp, the interaction between the ballast and the lamp is more sensitive than that of a conventional low frequency (50/60Hz) ballast. During the startup process, including the transition from glow to arc discharge, HID lamps may have asymmetrical impedance resulting unequal voltages of the voltage divider capacitors of the half-bridge inverter (See Fig. 8).

For instance, let $V_2 > V_3$, where $V_2 + V_3 = V_1 = \text{constant}$. At the end of the startup process, the lamp goes into arc discharge state having symmetrical impedance. Therefore, if the ON-times of the main switches are equal, a transient process starts, and after a certain time interval, the equilibrium $V_2 = V_3$ is achieved. During this transient process high current peak occurs ($V_2 > V_3$) which can damage the main switches of the inverter. Furthermore, the inductor may be also saturated causing an extra current peak exceeding the maximum allowable current peak values of the main switches.

The present invention provides a protection, namely a dynamic solution for the limitation of high current peaks during the startup process.

Furthermore, the present invention introduces a different, and more effective ignition solution than the ignition solution of US patent No. 6,329,761, providing essentially less stress for the main switches of a half-bridge inverter.

Also, the present invention provides a special MOSFET driver solution for the main switches of a half-bridge inverter, wherein the main switches can be simultaneously switched off applying an more effective solution comparing to the MOSFET drivers applied in the mentioned patent

applications, for instance in US patent No. 6,329,761, wherein the main switches can be simultaneously switched off slowly, causing high dissipation in the switches at inductive load, therefore, they are incapable for fast and repeating current protection caused by an asymmetrical load during the startup process.

Furthermore, the theoretical background for the practical lamp power control, where the lamp is connected in series with an inductor and supplied by a square wave inverter (push-pull, half-bridge, or full bridge) resulting a special ballast curve can be found in a paper of J. Melis, entitled "Ballast Curves for HPS Lamps Operating on High Frequency" (IAS' 92).

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a high efficient switchmode half-bridge square wave inverter which has protection against the effect of asymmetrical loads.

A second object of the present invention to provide a reliable electronic ballast for gas discharge devices acting as temporary asymmetrical loads at startup.

A further object of the present invention to provide an effective driver solution capable to switch off simultaneously the main switches of a half-bridge inverter controlled by square wave voltage signal having three states (+12V, 0V, -12V).

Another object of the present invention to provide a simple power control of the load, especially HID lamps, where the lamp power remains constant during the aging of the lamp which means continuously increasing lamp voltage, or equivalently, increasing ohmic impedance at high frequency operation.

Further object of the present invention to provide a fast, direct limitation of the load current caused by the asymmetrical impedance of an ignited high intensity gas discharge (HID) lamp during the startup process.

Another object of the present invention to provide a high voltage ignition circuit for a reliable ignition of HID lamps, especially an almost instant reigniting of warmed up lamps in a wide temperature range.

Further object of the present invention to provide dimming capability for the lamp providing significant energy saving under certain conditions when the full power (full light) of the lamp is not required in certain times.

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be more readily apparent from the following detailed description, wherein reference is made to the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic diagram of the preferred half-bridge inverter for HID lamps connected to a DC power supply (power factor pre-regulator) including an Ignitor, Current Transformer, two identical MOSFET Drivers, Logic Supply and a Control Unit;

FIG. 2 shows the ignition signals and related control waveforms;

FIG. 3A shows the preferred schematic diagram of the preferred MOSFET Drivers providing effective drivers and fast simultaneous switching off solution for the main switches, which are generally accomplished by MOSFETs in higher frequency range;

FIG. 3B shows the control signals of preferred MOSFET Driver;

FIG. 4 shows the preferred schematic diagram of the Control Unit;

FIG. 5 shows the waveforms of an unsuccessful startup, namely in the cases of no load condition or failed lamp ignition;

FIG. 6 shows the waveforms of a normal, successful startup process;

FIG. 7 shows the main voltage waveforms of the Control Unit;

FIG. 8 shows the waveform of the transient asymmetrical operation during the startup process of a HID lamp;

FIG. 9 shows the ballast curve including the warming up and constant power ranges provided by the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Fig.1 shows a schematic diagram of the preferred half-bridge inverter configuration as an electronic ballast for HID lamps, where the Half-Bridge Inverter, connected to a DC power supply through the capacitor C1, is illustrated in detail. In many cases, the DC power supply is implemented by a Power Factor Pre-regulator providing high power factor and stabilized DC voltage source (V1) for the Half-Bridge Inverter as it is also shown in Fig. 1. The Input Unit is connected to an AC Power Supply (50/60Hz, 120V - 240V). A Logic Supply provides stabilized 12V for the Control Unit (connecting points 1 and 2) which is also shown in Fig. 1. The Control Unit will be described in details.

The Half-Bridge Inverter includes the basic components of a half-bridge inverter: two electronically controlled switches (MOSFETs T1 and T2), two voltage divider capacitors C2 and C3 and a load impedance (a HID lamp connected in series with an inductor M3).

The Half-Bridge Inverter also includes the preferred embodiment of a high voltage ignition apparatus in which winding N1 of the inductor M3 is connected in series with the capacitor C5 and MOSFET T3. When T3 is on, a high frequency damped sinusoidal voltage occurs across the winding N1. This voltage is transformed up by winding N2 to an approximately 2000V providing sufficient ignition voltage (V_L) for a HID lamp shown in Fig. 2, also achieving almost instant reigniting of warmed up lamps. The ON/OFF-times of transistor T3 is controlled by the Control Unit (connecting point 4), where V9 (see Fig. 4) is the gate voltage of T3. The capacitor C5 is periodically charged by resistor R5 since the OFF-time of T3 is essentially longer than its ON-time. The rectifier D1 limits the drain voltage of MOSFET T3 approximately to the DC supply voltage V1.

The Half-Bridge Inverter further includes the preferred embodiment of two identical MOSFET drivers MD-1 and MD-2 utilized by the present invention. The MOSFET Driver MD-1 is shown in Fig. 3A, including a low power MOSFET T4, a low power bipolar transistors T5, rectifiers D9, D10, D11 and D12 connected in a bridge configuration, a capacitor C9, resistors R18, R19, R20 and R21, and a diode D12. A square wave AC control signals V6 (see Fig. 3B) is provided by the secondary winding N4 (connecting points A1 and A2) of the low power signal transformer M2

shown in Fig. 1. Similarly, the secondary winding N5 (connecting points A3 and A4) is connected to the MOSFET Driver MD-2. The primary winding N3 of the signal transformer M2 is connected to the connecting points 8 and 9 of the Control Unit. During the positive half-period, with respect to the point sign of the secondary winding N4, a positive voltage is connected across the resistor R19 and rectifier D10 to the gate of the N-channel power MOSFET T1 providing ON-state, while the MOSFET T4 is in OFF-state. During the negative half-period, a positive voltage is connected across resistor R18 and rectifier D9 to the gate of T4 providing ON-state. Therefore, the gate of T1 is short circuited to the source of T1 by MOSFET T4 providing an excellent current sink capability thus a very short switching off time for MOSFET T1. In both half periods the capacitor C9 is charged through the resistor R20 and diode D12 nearly to the amplitude of the square wave voltage V6. Furthermore, the bipolar transistor T5 is connected to the gate of MOSFET T4 in such a way that when the output voltage of the control transformer is zero, the MOSFETs T4 will be ON for an appropriate time, therefore power MOSFET T1 will be OFF as it is illustrated in Fig. 3B where V17 is the gate voltage of T1 and V18 is the gate voltage of T4. This low power loss MOSFET driver was specifically designed for inductive loads as it is in our case. Evidently, the same description can be applied for the upper MOSFET driver MD-2. Therefore, very low power loss can be achieved with respect to the switching transistors T1 and T2, resulting high efficiency for the half-bridge inverter. The main signals for the preferred MOSFET driver are shown in Fig. 3B, illustrating the simultaneous OFF-states of the main switching power transistor T1 and T2 if the square wave control signals $V6 = V7 = 0$ in current limiting mode.

The Half-Bridge Inverter also includes a Current Transformer including an actual transformer M1, where the primary winding N6 is connected in series with the load and the secondary winding N7 connected to the AC input of a bridge rectifier implemented by the fast rectifiers D2, D3, D5, and D5. The DC output of the bridge rectifier is connected to resistor R6 providing low voltage signal V5 nearly proportional to the load current. The output points of the Current Transformer A5, and A6 are connected to the connecting points 5 and 6 of the Control Unit as it is shown in Fig. 1. Therefore, the transient operation at asymmetrical loads can be controlled by the Control Unit as it will be described later.

The Power Unit further includes a power resistor R1 in which the current I1 has an unidirectional

high frequency waveform determined by the DC Power Supply, which is generally a boost converter. The voltage across the resistor is filtered by C4 and R3 connected in series with R2 (RC filter), therefore the voltage V4 across C4 is nearly DC and proportional to the average load current. This voltage – assuming nearly constant DC supply voltage V1 for the half-bridge inverter, is also proportional to the input power of the half-bridge inverter (ballast) which is nearly equal to the lamp power. Since the input voltage (V1) of the actual ballast unit (Half-Bridge Inverter) is nearly constant, the control of the lamp power can be easily implemented by frequency control in a relatively narrow range. If the Dimming Switch S1 (connected in series with resistor R4) is ON, the voltage V4 significantly increases. In this case the frequency of the inverter will have a predetermined maximum value providing approximately half power for the lamp.

Fig. 4 shows a detailed schematic diagram of the Control Unit providing appropriate control signals for the Half-Bridge Inverter, namely driver signals for MOSFETs T1, T2, and T3. Functionally, the Control Unit has three basic parts: a Timer, a Current Limiter, and a Frequency Controller connected to a voltage controlled oscillator (VCO) IC4.

A) Timer. The Timer unit is controlled by voltage comparator IC1, where the inverting input is connected through the connecting point 3 of the Control Unit to the common point of the voltage divider resistors R7 and R8 (A7) shown in Fig. 1. Therefore, the voltage on the inverting input of IC1 (V1p) is proportional to the voltage V1 (see Fig. 1).

The startup process of the Control Unit (Fig. 4), therefore the whole circuit, is illustrated in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, where $V1s < V1_{(nom)} < V1r < V1_{(max)}$.

1. $V1 \geq V1s$. The Logic Supply provides stabilized 12V for the Control Unit, and $V8=12V$ since $V1p < 6V$, and $V10=12V$.

2. $V1 \geq V1r$. The voltage $V8 = 0$ since $V1p > 6V$, and the TIMER starts providing periodical ON/OFF signals (V9) for T3.

3a. Unsuccessful ignition or no load condition (see Fig. 5). After a predetermined time, for instance 120s, the voltage V10 goes to zero and stops the periodical ON/OFF signal V9 for T3 ($V9=0$), and also switches off the main switches T1 and T2 ($V15=V17=0$).

3b. Successful ignition (see Fig. 6). Assuming that the first ignition signal ignited the lamp, the supply voltage V_1 drops below V_{1r} (the DC Power Supply is loaded, and $V_1 = V_{1(nom)}$ which is equal to its regulated value), therefore $V_8 = 12V$ and it resets the TIMER ($V_9 = 0$, and V_{10} remains high). The circuit solution for the Timer may be based on a CMOS ripple counter and a simple square wave oscillator.

B) Current Limiter. The output signal V_5 of Current Transformer is connected to the connecting points 5 and 6 of the Control Unit as it is shown in Fig. 4. Therefore, the voltage of the inverting input of the voltage comparator $V_{12} = V_{11} + V_5$ as it is shown in Fig. 7. The voltage V_{11} is provided by the common point of the voltage divider resistors R_9 and R_{10} . Three resistors, R_{11} , R_{12} and R_{13} are connected in series, where the common point of resistors R_{11} and R_{12} is connected to the non-inverting input of IC2 and the common point of resistors R_{12} and R_{23} is connected to the output of IC2 through a diode D_6 , resulting a resettable bistable multivibrator. The reset is provided in every half-period by differentiating the output signals V_{14} and V_{15} of the IC4 (VCO). These differentiators include capacitors C_8 , C_7 , and resistors R_{16} , R_{17} , respectively. The resulting waveforms are added and rectified by diodes D_7 , D_8 and connected to the non-inverting input of IC2. The waveform V_{13} is shown in Fig. 7. Under normal condition when the output current I_L remains in a predetermined range, the circuit has no effect. If the output current reaches the maximum allowable value, the output voltage of IC2 goes to zero ($V_{10} = 0$) as it is shown in Fig. 7, and forces the driver signals V_{15} and V_{17} going to zero since it is connected to the each input of the dual input AND gates (IC5/1, IC5/2, IC5/3 and IC5/4). The other inputs of the dual input AND gates are connected to the outputs of IC4 (V_{14} and V_{15}). When $V_{10} = 0$, then $V_{15} = V_{17} = 0$ and the main switches T_1 and T_2 of the inverter are simultaneously switched off as it was described previously. All main signals of the Control Unit are summarized in Fig. 7. Furthermore, Fig. 8 also illustrates the operation of the Current Limiter at asymmetrical operation, when $V_2 > V_3$ ($V_2 + V_3 = V_1$, and remains constant) and the output (lamp) current I_L reaches a predetermined maximum value $I_{L(max)}$. The normal (symmetrical) operation is also shown in Fig. 8, where $V_2 = V_3$, and the output current I_L is symmetrical.

C) Frequency Controller. This unit is based on the operational amplifier IC3, where the non-inverting input (connecting point 7) is connected to voltage V_4 of capacitor C_4 shown in Fig. 1.

The output of IC3 controls the frequency of the voltage controlled oscillator IC4. The outputs V14 and V16 are symmetrical square wave signals in opposite phase and are connected to the dual input AND gates of IC5. The gates IC5/1, IC5/2 and IC5/3, IC5/4 are connected parallel for increased current sink and source capability. The outputs (V15 and V17) of IC5 are the connecting points 8 and 9 of the Control Unit and are connected to the primary winding (N3) of transformer M2 (see Fig. 1) resulting a full-bridge configuration. As it was mentioned previously, the voltage V4 is nearly proportional to the lamp power. Therefore, the lamp power can be controlled by the frequency of a VCO (IC4) in a certain range. The maximum and the minimum frequency is determined by the resistors R16 and R17, respectively. In summary, the frequency of the voltage controlled oscillator IC4 is controlled by the operational amplifier IC3 in such a way that the lamp power remains the same in a predetermined lamp voltage range (80V – 160V for HPS lamps and 120V – 150V for MH lamps).

Fig. 9 shows the ballast curve (lamp power P_L vs. lamp voltage V_L). It includes the warm up range ($V_L < V_{L(min)}$), where the lamp current frequency is minimum (f_{min}), and the constant power range ($V_{L(min)} \leq V_L \leq V_{L(max)}$), where the frequency is controlled ($f_{min} \leq f \leq f_{min} + \Delta f$) providing nearly constant lamp power. It also shows the dimmed operation, where the frequency has its maximum value (f_{max}) and remains the same (uncontrolled operation). The dimmed operation is achieved by closing the Dimming Switch S1 shown in Fig. 1. Therefore, the voltage V4 increases significantly causing the operational amplifier IC3 (see Fig. 4) out of its control range, and the frequency of the VCO (IC4) will have its maximum value determined by the resistor R14 and R15. At dimmed operation the output power (lamp power) is not controlled, but it remains in an acceptable practical range, determined by the ballast curve at maximum frequency. The dimmed operation, where the lamp power is approximately the half (40% - 50%) of its nominal value provides significant energy saving if the full lamp power is not required in certain times.

Thus, while preferred embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described in details, it is to be understood that such adaptation and modifications as may occur to those skilled in the art may be employed departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, as set forth in the claims.